

March 2003

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Free

# TOTAL GAMER

## The Legend of Zelda

Japanese Preview

## Top 10 Games of 2002

Mortal Kombat



MechAssault



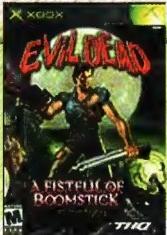
Plus Reviews of Splinter Cell, Metroid Prime  
and Skies of Arcadia Legends



**microplay**

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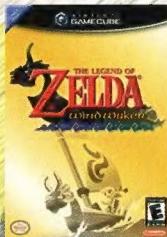
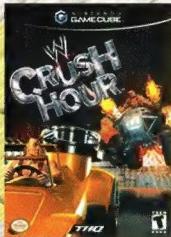
## WHERE THE GAMES BEGIN.



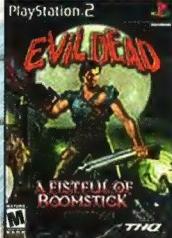
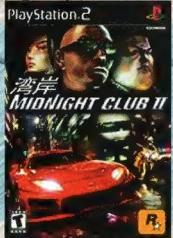
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## March 2003



Welcome to Total Gamer's first issue of 2003. The crazy holiday release schedules are all over and done with, but some important games have hit store shelves during the first two months of the year (and more games are just around the corner). Check out what we've got on-board this month and come back in April for our pre-E3 coverage.

## Top 10 Games of 2002

Total Gamer staff took a look at the long list of games that were released last year and narrowed it down to our 10 favourites. Take a peek at our picks and then tell us how your list would be different.



14



6



10

## The Legend of Zelda

Canadians will soon have the new adventure game starring a cel-shaded Link to play, but we were fortunate enough to get a copy of at the already-released Japanese version. We couldn't understand a word on the screen, but we got the gist. We have a full report on it for you this month.

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Editorial Director Editor	David Tanaka Chris Talbot <i>chris.talbot@tcp.ca</i>
Assistant Editor	Andrew Moore-Crispin <i>andrew.moore-crispin@tcp.ca</i>
Contributing Writers	Marc Saltzman Suzanne Ashe Frank Lenk Chad Sapiela Ted Kritsonis
Art Director Production	Steven Stoner Patricia Bonci Chris Brockley Roxanna Bennett Lara Bazant
Publisher Associate Publisher Product Manager Marketing Manager	Dick Peters Rob Crawford Scott Piccolo Natalia Nosovskaya

Advertising Ontario	Joanna Dickie 416-923-7100
Western Canada	Frank Howie 403-228-3355
Eastern Canada	Chris Cole 613-789-6311

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# Old consoles never die, they just collect dust

The TotalGamer.ca discussion forums have an area set aside to talk about old video game systems, and there is occasional banter about who loves what old system or whether or not they're even worth discussing. It's clear some of the forum regulars are old-time gamers, and topics have ranged from the Colecovision to the Atari 2600 to the Nintendo Entertainment System to the Turbo Grafx 16. At one point a couple of months ago, those of us who still stood by our old consoles were simply told by one forum poster to get with the times and let go of the old systems. Rebuttals were few. However, I'd like to now make a public statement about this controversial topic: Old consoles never die, they just go out of style; but the games live on.

My video game collection still sports a Sega Master System and a Super Nintendo Entertainment System (my Colecovision was lost to the ages, sadly), and although they generally take the backseat to PlayStation 2, GameCube and Xbox these days, they still get played once in awhile. In fact, I recently busted out my SNES and popped in the classic *Super Mario World*. With that in mind, take a look at a game store's Game Boy Advance shelves these days. Note how many Sega Genesis, SNES and other 16-bit console games have been ported to GBA. It's not a small number. In fact, we've reviewed some of these games in the pages of *Total Gamer*.

As the old cliché goes, what's old is new again. There are countless game collections for console and PC that allow matured (not necessarily mature, of course) game players to check out all the old arcade, console and PC games they played in their youth. Companies like Activision and Namco (to name two) have recently released new collections of old games for current generation consoles (and not for the first time, either), and some of the most popular games of yesteryear make appearances on GBA.

For gamers who never had the old consoles or who sold them off for \$5 at a garage sale, these re-releases are perfect, but packrats like myself are fortunate enough to be able to play the originals on the machines they were built for (and thus we can avoid shelling out the cash for those old games yet again). So those who always go for the latest and greatest and drop yesterday's console like it's not worth the hardware used to build it, go ahead and look down on those once-favourite machines. I can be found beating on a 16-bit Bowser for the next few weeks on a dated piece of hardware.

Chris Talbot  
Editor



Photo by Sean Carruthers

## Your Letters

### Vice City vs. Pajama Sam?

I have been a fan of your magazine for a year now. My friend and I were wondering: Why did you give *Pajama Sam* for PC a better score than *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* for PS2, a game a lot of people were waiting for?

**Joshua Richard**

Reviews are opinions, Joshua. Also, they're two entirely different types of games. You just can't make a direct comparison with a game intended for young children and one intended for the over-18 crowd. Suzanne Ashe was obviously quite fond of *Pajama Sam: No Need To Hide When It's Dark Outside*, and her five-star rating says it's definitely worth adding to any kids' games collection.

### Mac users are gamers, too

I just saw a *Total Gamer* ad in *The Computer Paper* and it said you "cover all platforms." I went to your Web site but nothing on Macs. Why is that? In Canada there are approximately 250,000 Mac users and one-third of people play games daily, and I guarantee I would visit your site if you had Mac games covered.

**Sebastian Stan Bruski**

I'd shy away from actually calling Macintosh a gaming platform. I'm afraid there just aren't enough Mac gamers out there to warrant Mac-specific reviews. The majority of Mac users (which make up only about five per cent of the computer market, by the way) seem to use their Macs for work (like those in the graphic design business) rather than play. Most Mac games are direct ports of Windows-based games as it is, and it's rare that Mac users get a game before Windows users (or even at the same time). The only one in recent memory is *WarCraft III*, which launched for Windows and Mac simultaneously.



**Rating system**

- 0 Star:** Coaster/doorstop material.
- 1 Star:** Played it for awhile before setting our coffees on it.
- 2 Star:** Playable, but lacking.
- 3 Star:** Try before you buy.
- 4 Star:** Excellent, but not worth an award.
- 5 Star:** If you can afford one game, this is the one.



# MADE IN

BY MARC SALTZMAN

# CANADA

## **Ubi Soft looking for new *Myst* beta testers**

Ready to get *Myst*-ified all over again? Last month, Ubi Soft officially announced their highly-anticipated online game, *Uru: Online Ages Beyond Myst*. For the first time in this coveted 10-year-old franchise, players will have the chance to fully explore the underground D'mi empire and mingle with other like-minded adventurers.



"*Uru* is an ancient word, the earliest word for city. It is rooted in the idea of a gathering of people, which is precisely what *Uru* will foster," said Rand Miller, founder of Cyan Worlds. Miller added, "We've been working for almost five years developing the cutting edge technology, detailed design and breathtaking graphics that allow us to build real-time online worlds that go beyond *Myst*." With 12 million units sold worldwide, *Myst* is one of the most widely recognized and critically acclaimed game brands in history.

Explorers wishing to help test the game during its beta phase are invited to apply today by visiting <http://uru.ubi.com>.

*Uru: Online Ages Beyond Myst* should be ready by the fall of 2003.

## **Strategy First strikes a Just deal**

Montreal-based PC game publisher Strategy First has just announced an agreement with developer Just Flight to bring four *Microsoft Flight Simulator* add-on discs to the North American market.

In 2003, Strategy First will publish *Battle of Britain Memorial Flight*, *The Dam Busters*, *World Airliners* and *World Airports*.

For more information on these expansion packs, visit [www.strategyfirst.com](http://www.strategyfirst.com).



## **Are you Extreme enough?**



Digital Extremes, the creators of the best-selling Xbox game *Unreal Championship* is looking for a few good men (or women) to work on upcoming video games.

Available positions are game programmer, texture artist and level designer. The individual must have a university degree and would relocate to London, Ontario, but the Digital Extremes Web site promises, "We provide excellent compensation packages."

Send your bio/CV to [resume@digitalextremes.com](mailto:resume@digitalextremes.com)

## **Impossible Creatures mods a plenty**

Microsoft's *Impossible Creatures*, developed by Vancouver-based Relic Entertainment, is a unique PC strategy game that challenges players to create a variety of war-hungry creatures. Along with its lengthy single-player campaign and many multiplayer options, the game also supports a number of user-made modifications.

For example, Blitz! is a tactical World War II mod for *Impossible Creatures* that includes air, ground and sea units, while Project Deep Sea focuses exclusively on the creatures of the deep.

To download and install *Impossible Creatures* mods, visit Relic's community Web page at [www.relic.com/community/community.php](http://www.relic.com/community/community.php)

And those who want to try out creating their own game modifications should start by visiting the *Impossible Creatures* Genetics Lab forum at <http://forums.relicnews.com>.



# Splinter Cell

1

Not only is *Splinter Cell* one of the sweetest games we've ever laid our eyes on, it's made right here in the Great White North (Ubi Soft's Montreal Studios, to be specific).

With its superb gameplay, outstanding lighting effects, the voice of tough guy Michael Ironside and its Canadian heritage backing it up, we're proud to honour *Splinter Cell* as our pick for the best game of 2002.

Sam Fisher, member of the NSA sub-agency Third Echelon, had some rough competition to end up as this year's leading man, but Ubi Soft's developers made him shine on Xbox during the holiday season (and within a matter of months, it'll be on PS2, GameCube, GBA and PC). It seems stealth-based games have grabbed Total Gamer staff members by the collar and refused to let go – check out last year's list and you'll see *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* for PS2 in the numero uno spot.



XBOX

If stealth was key in our first place title, number two has anything but. Just like in its predecessor, *Grand Theft Auto III*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is all about gunplay, driving like a maniac and becoming a high-ranking underworld criminal the hard way.

Developer Rockstar North took *GTA3*, changed the locale to a fake Florida city in the 1980s, fixed a few annoying quirks and hired an all-star cast to voice the main characters: Ray Liotta, known for a good share of mob movies, stars as Tommy Vercetti, a tough Mafia dude who's just spent 15 years in prison and is looking to get back into the biz. Other stars on board include Gary Busey, Dennis Hopper, Danny Trejo, Luis Guzman and Philip Michael Thomas (you do remember *Miami Vice*, right?).

All in all, *Vice City* rightfully deserves its place on our Top 10 list. Take your '80s adjective of choice and stick it here – awesome, radical, etc.

PS2



2

# Grand Theft Auto: Vice City



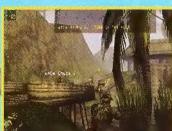
PS2

Sam Fisher, Tommy Vercetti and... Donald Duck? What?

Yes, Donald, Goofy and Sora surprised us, too. What at first seemed like an adventure based on a Disney theme park soon had one of our editors pulling all-nighters trying to pound the stuffing out of the likes of Jafar, Ursula and the Heartless. With easily more than 30 hours worth of gameplay value, *Kingdom Hearts* came out of the Squaresoft studios and mixed the many worlds of Disney with those of *Final Fantasy*. Those who've played it know it worked like a charm; those who mock don't know what they're missing.

3

# Kingdom Hearts



4

Whether you're shooting it out online with complete strangers or issuing orders verbally to your AI teammates in the single-player campaign, *SOCOM* proved to be a worthwhile tactical shooter. As each and every console manufacturer launched an online initiative, few online launch titles stood out as truly remarkable in both single-player and online. Only Sony's first-party title *SOCOM* managed to wow us on both fronts. If you're thinking of going online, *SOCOM* is the game to get.



PS2

# SOCOM: US Navy Seals

TOP TEN

We've reduced an entire year's worth of great games to a list of the 10 best. It wasn't an easy task, and we're expecting a few quibbles, complaints and probably some nasty insults from our most vocal readers (but bring it, baby, we can take it). It took weeks to agree on this list, and we had a few mishaps along the way — everything from thrown video game cases to slanderous rumours about our lineages (just kidding), but we managed to agree on this list of *Total Gamer*'s Top 10 of 2002. Enjoy.



Samus Aran returned to consoles after a long break, and the first demo we tried blew us away. The *Metroid* franchise ditched its 2D side-scrolling roots and went first-person. The

first-person platformer had great graphics, an interesting storyline and gameplay that worked fairly well for only using one analogue stick to manoeuvre the famous Nintendo character.

5

## Metroid Prime

The rest of our Top 10 list finishes off with these magnificent titles:

6. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4
7. The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind for Xbox/PC
8. Super Mario Sunshine for GameCube
9. Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003
10. Virtua Fighter 4 for PS2



GAMECUBE..



# GAMES TO WATCH FOR IN 2003

**The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker for GameCube**

**Super Mario 128 for GameCube**

**Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided for PC/PS2/Xbox**

**Halo 2 for Xbox**

**Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc**

**Doom 3 for PC**

# THE PHANTOM

According to a statement issued in early January, there could be a new player in the console market by the end of the year. The Phantom from Infinium Labs seems to be an online-only console system built on PC architecture, although Infinium hasn't released any real details about its mysterious game machine. We can't predict whether we'll actually see The Phantom any time soon, but you can keep tabs on it in the pages of *Total Gamer* and at our Web site ([www.totalgamer.ca](http://www.totalgamer.ca)).

# GAMES of 2003

PS2

# RATCHET & CLANK

With few good platformers on PS2, Ratchet & Clank deserves a look, but the strikes against it means it won't make any new platformer fans.

Gameplay is standard platform fare: Complete a puzzle, toast some enemies, make some jumps, get a new power-up, then take on a level boss. The controls and overall feel of the game borrow heavily from the Spyro series.

The biggest draw for *Ratchet & Clank* are the many and varied gadgets and weapons, about 35 in all. Weapons run the gamut from the standard wrench attack to the RYNO (Rip You a New One) rocket launcher, while gadgets range from the Heli-Pack to the Hydro Displacer, used to fill or empty pools.

Gamers looking for a long game to keep their interest would do well to give *Ratchet & Clank* a look, as length is one of its strong suits. However, the levels feel repetitive.

Where graphics are concerned, *Ratchet & Clank* has no rivals in the platformer genre. The environments are massive with a wide array of moving objects in the foreground and background.

Control is generally tight, but a few minor issues make performing some platform jumps or winning firefights more difficult than need be.

—Andrew Moore-Crispin



★★★

## Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance

Publisher: Midway Developer: Midway

Seems like Midway has learned its lesson since releasing the abysmal *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*.

*Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* brings it back to what popularized the first of the series in 1992, and what has kept gamers' interest through four sequels: Bloody beatings administered through skill rather than mindless button mashing.

While button mashers will still be able to break in to *MK:DA*, they would be advised to follow the story mode — which acts as a training ground using all the characters in succession — to learn combos and special moves or face the consequences when going up against anyone that took the time to figure out some of the finer points of kicking butt. —Andrew Moore-Crispin



BAYONETTA



SHIBURO



MATURE  
M  
C E R T I F I C A T E

★★★

## The Simpsons Skateboarding

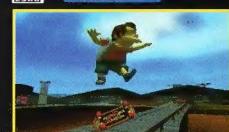
Publisher: EA Developer: The Code Monkeys

First, the good news: *The Simpsons Skateboarding* doesn't suck. Some fans of the prime-time cartoon have been keeping a running tally on the number of bad games featuring its characters — and it isn't pretty.

Don't think for a second that this newest *Simpsons* game can compete with the likes of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*, though. While *The Simpsons Skateboarding* is a fun and sometimes funny game featuring the usual suspects of Springfield, extreme sports gamers will find it lacking in many ways (including gameplay, the range of skate parks available and in the repetitive *Simpsons* quips). As an introductory skateboarding game, it's a fun game featuring TV's most popular family. —Chris Talbot



E  
TEN  
YEARS



★★★

# DRAGON BALL Z

## BUDOKAI

武道会

Publisher: Infogrames Developer: FUNimation

The action and characters from Dragon Ball Z are all here in Dragon Ball Z: Budokai. This simplistic fighting game may not stack up against games like *Virtua Fighter 4*, but the easy-to-learn controls and the story mode will please DBZ fans.



The controls for the game seem sluggish, but the slow response time is balanced out by the fact that both players and AIs suffer, so players will get used to it fast. Four modes of play are available – story, duel, world tournament and practice. Practice allows you to learn the controls while duel is the genre's classic versus

mode. In world tournament, you choose a character and try to place high in the rankings, thereby unlocking other tournaments. Five characters are available to play, but there are another 17 to unlock.

Story mode features a DBZ tale about evil Saiyans trying to destroy the heroes' planet. Voice acting is laughable and the story is goofy, but the game itself is a decent fighter.

Chris Talbot

# Shinobi

Publisher: Sega Developer: Sega

*Shinobi* was one of my favourites on the Sega Master System, so I was quite thrilled (and concerned) when Sega brought the game back in a new form on PS2.

Sega developers replaced the side-scrolling view with a third-person following view, and the original star, Joe Musashi, has been replaced with Hotsuma and his ridiculously-long red scarf. In old-school fashion, the story of *Shinobi* takes a backseat to the intense action. Hotsuma, leader of the Oboro clan, battles through post-apocalyptic Tokyo to find out why demons have destroyed his clan. As expected, Hotsuma has to slice through a lot of bad guys before achieving his goal. To keep the ninja moving, his sword (Akujiki) actually feeds off Hotsuma's lifeforce if too much time goes by without a kill.

Even though gameplay is in 3D, platformer-style, it reminds me of the old 2D *Shinobi* titles. Players still have to chop up mindless villains, bear on tough bosses and fight through monster-filled streets. Ninja magic, shuriken and various fighting techniques are available, but this game is hard; really hard. Villains aren't just going to keel over and die with one sword swipe, so beware – Tokyo's a dangerous place.

Chris Talbot



**GAMECUBE**

# METROID PRIME

Publisher: Nintendo Developer: Nintendo

Some game reviewers have called *Metroid Prime* the prime reason to own a GameCube. We won't go that far, but Samus Aran's 128-bit starring debut shows off the trademark gameplay and attention to detail that has made Nintendo synonymous with solid first party titles.

**Mario Kart** (Sony PlayStation 2) **Metroid Prime** (GameCube)

**Publisher/Developer:** Nintendo

*The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* is a direct port of the only *Zelda* game released in North America for the SNES, but with the multiplayer *Four Swords* game, it's worth checking out for fans of the series.

Gamers new to the *Zelda* series will find the first *Zelda* title to make its way to the GBA shows its age and lacks some of the sophistication of Link's more recent outings and is outshined by the likes of *Oracle of Ages* and *Oracle of Seasons* for Game Boy Colour.

**Four Swords** puts up to four gamers into one dungeon where they must cooperate to rid the dungeon of monsters and work together to solve puzzles, but they are also competing to collect the most rupees and make it out of the dungeon first.

--Andrew Moore-Crispin



les and taking out space pirates as well as all forms of sentient fauna and flora on the planet Telos IV.

Metroid Prime, while it does play out in first-person, is more a platformer than a FPS. With this in mind, a third-person view would likely serve the game better. While the first-person mode is, for the most part, functional and the control is tight, it would be a lot better if the C-stick controlled Samus' head, while using the analogue stick to move forward and back and to strafe left and right. Instead, the C-stick is used to select weapons. To strafe or move Samus' head, gamers have to hold in the L or R triggers.

Control foibles aside, *Metroid Prime* plays beautifully. Some of the puzzles will tax gamers' minds, but they are worked into the game so well that it doesn't hold up the gameplay.

As the game progresses, Samus collects a ton of suit upgrades, new weapons and abilities that enable her to reach doors and levels that she couldn't make it to before, including super jump, morph ball, varia suit, and ice beam.

—Andrew Moore-Crispin



If you haven't played Dreamcast's *Skies of Arcadia*, you're not alone. Now repackaged as *Skies of Arcadia Legends*, this stellar RPG takes players on a magical ride filled with giant airships, swashbuckling combat and a well-crafted story of good versus evil.

The story begins as a young air pirate, Vyse, and his cute sidekick Aika, set out to rescue an enslaved girl from the oppressive Valuan Empire. All three eventually band together to prevent Arcadia from falling into the wrong hands.

The turn-based combat is a combination of mano-a-mano and airship-to-airship, and features more than 70 customizable weapons.

This iteration of Skies includes a new mode dubbed Wanted Battle (where players must surf the unfriendly skies looking for bad guys), improved graphics, additional characters to interact with and more side-puzzles and story elements.

Sentimentality for the original game aside, *Skies of Arcadia Legends* is a highly-addictive, attractive and deep adventure you shouldn't miss this time around.

*—Marc Saltzman*



## SKIES OF ARCADIA LEGENDS

**Разработчик:** Заря **Руководитель:** Павел Чирков



# GAMECUBE



## STAR WARS: BOUNTY HUNTER



down and capture an elusive former Jedi in charge of a mysterious, deadly cult.

Players must battle through six unique worlds, such as Tatooine and Coruscant, each housing six levels apiece, before reaching the climactic conclusion of this single-player game.

Despite some finicky camera angles, this intense action game is played from a third-person perspective, resulting in a more cinematic look that'll undoubtedly appeal to serious Star Wars enthusiasts. Other movie-like touches include many impressive cutscene sequences, more than 100 characters to interact with and an orchestrated John Williams soundtrack.

—As Samus Aran blasted onto GameCube, she also took a side tour on GBA. While not as graphically stunning as *Metroid Prime*, *Metroid Fusion* is a good 2D side-scroller.

*Fusion* looks very similar to the original NES *Metroid* and contains a typical array of weaponry and devices. This time, Samus has been infected by a parasitic alien known as X, and although she is saved from certain death by a vaccine, X is still a danger. As fate has it, Samus soon heads to X's world to destroy the parasite for good.

*Metroid Fusion* lives up to the *Metroid* legacy and provides hours of fun. It can't compare to *Prime*, but completing both will give fans some extra thrills.

Publisher: LucasArts Developer: LucasArts

It doesn't require a Jedi mind trick to know LucasArts' *Star Wars* games can be hit or miss. Fortunately, *Bounty Hunter* is one of the finer *Star Wars*-based video games to date. The adventure stars Jango Fett, the most dreaded mercenary in the universe. In fact, *Bounty Hunter* marks

Fett's video debut. Armed with a jetpack and a lethal assortment of weapons, players

control a relentless Fett who must hunt

Publisher: Nintendo

As Samus Aran blasted onto GameCube, she also took a side tour on GBA. While not as graphically stunning as *Metroid Prime*, *Metroid Fusion* is a good 2D side-scroller.

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—Chris Talbot

## METROID FUSION



Anyone who's ever played the age-old board game will know the rules of *Monopoly Party*. Sadly, the game is graphically bland and the sound is lacking. A few graphical and gameplay glitches will also be found fairly quickly, like mistakes of who owns which properties (a glaring flaw that springs up somewhat frequently and causes a lot of frustration).

Normal mode is classic *Monopoly* (you can play on the original board or on one of four theme boards). Things change in party mode, but it's really not much of a party. It's the same old *Monopoly*, except that up to four players play their turns all at once. This only makes the game move along at a quicker pace.

Overall, *Monopoly Party* is a passable console version of *Monopoly* with a few alternate ways to play. If you already have the classic board game in another video game form, there's little reason to grab this one.

—Chris Talbot



## MONOPOLY PARTY

Publisher: Infogrames Developer: Runecraft



# Kid's Games

While Disney Golf isn't inherently bad, it's not very good either. Even kids will quickly tire of this game's ease and lack of options, playable characters, courses and charm.

Disney Golf reverts to the tried and true three-button press swing style, where timed button presses determine the power and accuracy of a shot. While there is also an option for younger kids to keep pace with more advanced players by using a slower meter requiring only two button presses, the game would do much better with a true style swing using the analogue stick.

Even with the checks and balances in place to make sure first-timers can still compete with video game golf pros, this game won't hold anyone's interest for very long. For older kids, the game is easily mastered while younger kids will get sick of watching the same character animations and interactions over and over again.

—Andrew Moore-Crispin



Although it's difficult to take a graphic-intensive game based on analogue stick controls and port it to the 16-bit, digital-only GBA, Realism managed to take the popular Super Monkey Ball for GameCube and make it portable.

While not without its flaws, *Super Monkey Ball Jr.* has all of the fun of the original game, despite the GBA's limitations. Some of the coolest mini-games are here (Monkey Fight, Monkey Bowling and Monkey Golf), but it's really too bad Monkey Race didn't make it in. The main game is an excellent port of the GameCube version, with players moving their ball-encased monkeys through obstacles to earn play points that can be used to unlock mini-games (no mini-games are available at start). With a link cable and extra copies of the game, players can go head-to-head, as well.

The GBA's D-pad makes it a bit harder to control the monkeys than with the 'Cube's analogue sticks, but it actually works quite well. This is one of the best GBA games I've ever seen.

—Chris Talbot



Publisher: THQ/Sega Developer: Sega/Realism



**SUPER MONKEY BALL JR.**

[www.totalgamer.ca](http://www.totalgamer.ca)

## Disney Golf

Publisher: Disney Interactive Developer: EA



## Hot Wheels Velocity X: Maximum Justice

Take your Hot Wheels off the dinky-car track and let loose on PS2, GameCube and PC by joining up with driver Maximum Justice and battling a gang of street racing thugs.

In this stunt driving and mission-based racing game, villains have claimed Monument City as their turf. As Max, you get to drive dozen of Hot Wheels cars armed with a bunch of different weapons. You'll be able to pull off crazy stunts, speed through loop-de-loops, drive on walls and race against a band of bad guys to take back the city.

Over 30 Hot Wheels cars have been popped into Maximum Justice to make it a fun stunt/racing game for kids. The cast of cartoonish characters just adds extra fun between the Hot Wheels action.

—Chris Talbot

Publisher: THQ Developer: Beyond Games



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\*Paintball-like activity used by special forces for training



# The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker

Another of Nintendo's franchise characters set to make a long awaited GameCube appearance is Link in the upcoming *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* game.

We played the full Japanese version of the game, which was released on Dec. 13. North American gamers will have to wait until March to get their hands on this title, as the original February release date has been pushed back.

The most noticeable difference for Link's 128-bit debut is that he's taken on a pretty radical new look. While Nintendo says each new *Zelda* game (*Wind Waker* marks the ninth) is not so much a sequel as it is an entirely new adventure, and as such, gets a different Link character, *Wind Waker* is the biggest departure from Link characters we've seen in the past.

In fact, the entire style of the game graphics is different, and has taken a pretty brave new cel-shaded look.

The central theme of Link's latest outing is (as the name implies) wind. With the help of a talking dragon sail boat, Link must control the wind direction using a musical interface similar to that in *Ocarina of Time*, in order to travel to different islands within the huge world where gamers must complete puzzles and use tools similar to those found in *The Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask*. Most puzzles in the game are of the familiar block moving, torch lighting and item gathering ilk.

Nintendo seems to be subscribing to the "less is more" school of thought in the graphics department. Rather than creating a lush and very detailed world, developers seem to be asking gamers to use their imaginations to fill in the blanks. With a few notable exceptions, like traveling by water, which is tedious and visually not very interesting, the new look works very well.

Environment effects like heat haze above a lit torch or lava and perspective forced focus, where some elements in the midrange of vision are slightly blurred but not hazy, make the bare bones graphics work.

The cel-shading technique, which Nintendo is calling "toon shading," has forced the developers to pay more attention to character actions and expressions. The disbelief associated with walking through a sometimes flat (by current video game standards) world is offset by an expressive Link. He reacts in many different ways to different actions

in the game and has very expressive eyes, which have the effect of helping gamers to believe the unbelievable.



By Andrew Moore-Crispin



RP  
Rating Pending

## Post Mortem

Publisher: DreamCatcher Developer: Microsoft

Had your fill of cute video game characters and predictable plot lines? Step into *Post Mortem*, a classic point-and-click adventure game – but with a macabre twist.

Set in Paris in the 1920s, players assume the role of an American ex-patriate eye who comes out of retirement to help a mysterious and sensuous woman investigate the gruesome murder of her sister and brother-in-law.

As it turns out, this ritualistic execution is part of a serial killing rooted in ancestral mystic beliefs. The opening movie sets the disturbing tone for the entire 15-hour adventure. Take note: *Post Mortem* is designed for players age 17 or older.

Like most adventure games of this kind, the protagonist, Gus MacPherson, must travel to various locations to dig up clues,

collect important items to help solve puzzles and chat with two dozen or so colourful characters. The game features about 6,000 lines of dialogue and multiple story paths.

Despite some cheesy voice acting and a slightly awkward dialogue tree, *Post Mortem* is perfect for mature players looking for a gratifying, atmospheric adventure.

Marc Saltzman



**Orbz**  
Publisher/Developer: Garage Games

It's not often you come across something really different amongst all the me-too games, but *Orbz* is that rare beast. It's a totally novel concept at a bargain price. And it's addictive as the Dickens.

The idea is deceptively simple. You start as a coloured sphere on a 3D playing field littered with yellow, orange and red stars. To move, you aim your crosshair then click the left mouse button to fire yourself through the air. The idea is to hit the stars, which then disappear. *Orbz* is an online multiplayer game, so you'll be competing with other players for the targets. When they're all gone, the round ends.

The game includes an online lobby, from which you can grab a quick game or search all the available sessions.

*Orbz* looks like kid stuff, but it's one of those games where you'll find yourself playing "just once more" until the wee hours.

—Frank Lenk



## Rock Manager

Publisher: DreamCatcher Developer: Monstercat AB

Form a band. Record a demo. Join a record label. Get on the charts. In *Rock Manager*, players accept the role of a rock band manager and move their way up the corporate ranks to work with every kind of band imaginable.

As a rookie manager, it's your job to kick off the career of a brand new rock band. The game begins with you forming a band and doing anything to get them some airplay and to sell copies of its album. After that, each mission has a different goal – from keeping a band from breaking up to helping a bunch of

old rockers make their comeback tour.

Foul language, alcohol and stereotypes of all kinds run through the game, adding a mature humour to the sleazy world of rock 'n' roll. *Rock Manager* is an easy-to-learn, mouse-driven game that will keep gamers happily laughing and clicking away for hours.

—Chris Talbot



# SPLINTER CELL

Publisher: Ubi Soft Developer: Ubi Soft Montreal

Gamers more prone to button mashing than acts of deft skill with a control pad should steer clear of *Splinter Cell*, but anyone with a penchant for stealth and cunning should step right up.

Graphics that are nothing short of amazing, along with some of the best use of 5.1 surround sound thus far in a video game, a compelling cast of characters, excellent control and a storyline and voice acting that feel like they're straight out of a movie combine to make *Splinter Cell* arguably the best game on the Xbox to date.

Gamers control just about every aspect of Sam Fisher's on-screen movements and must rely on stealth as opposed to sheer brute force and firepower. While shooting factors into the game often, bullets are hard to come by and many missions require that Sam inflict no casualties.

Mandatory training missions familiarize gamers with the many controls they will have to use in the game. Skills gamers will have to master include silent movement, hiding in shadows, distracting and incapacitating enemies and, of course, shooting.

— Andrew Moore-Crispin



Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, Rocky Balboa was synonymous with boxing. However, Rocky's stardom was replaced with real boxers like Mike Tyson and

the like, so why did developer

Rage make *Rocky* 12 years after the last film was released? Good question, because as a boxing game, *Rocky* will disappoint fans of the sport. However, the films' fans might enjoy getting the chance to follow Rocky's career in movie mode and face off against opponents like Apollo Creed and Clubber Lang.

*Rocky*'s gameplay is much simpler than what is found in boxing sports sims, and so the learning curve is fairly small. It's easy to control Rocky's movements and punches, but the AI seems to be far too easy for a game of this type. The patterns of AI characters aren't much more complex than decade-old boxing games, so you're guaranteed a win once you know when to throw a punch.

That said, *Rocky* is kind of fun and is a good game both in movie (i.e. story) mode and multiplayer mode.

Chris Talbot

# ROCKY



Publisher: Ubi Soft Developer: Rage



The *Mech* series goes back a long way, and it's gone through various transmutations over the years. With *MechAssault*, it lands like a bombshell in the console world.

*MechAssault* raises wanton destruction to an art.

Everything is fully destructible, and the graphics are superb even by Xbox standards.

On top of the single-player campaign, there are a lot of multiplayer options: Split screen, system link and Xbox Live. Multiplayer lacks the subtlety of *MechWarrior* combat, but offers

plenty of free-for-all fraggering fun.

Bottom line, this is a game whose fundamental fault is also its greatest strength. *MechAssault* is relentlessly non-stop, head-banging, scenery-scorching action, with precious little time for strategy or subtlety ... and with absolutely no apologies.—Frank Lenk



# XBOX

Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Just Add Monsters

From the Pam Grier-like blaxploitation woman to the Enter The Dragon-esque ninja, Kung Fu Chaos takes shots at martial arts cinema and makes no apologies.

We took a look at a nearly completed version of Kung Fu Chaos a few weeks before its release and it appears to be an odd arena fighting game. Graphically, the game is interesting, especially during playback of any level (where the graphics are given a grainy film quality interspersed with '70s film-style cuts and wipes). However, each level (every one is a parody of a real film) is all about beating up on the other characters on the screen.

Some levels have a certain amount of charm. For instance, the Jurassic Park rip-off where the characters are fighting while being chased by a rampaging T-rex is quite cool, particularly when the action moves to a plank being carried in the rex's jaws.

The game is very similar in concept to that of Loons (also on Xbox), the Looney Tunes party game, and Dreamcast's Powerstone.

We played Kung Fu Chaos for less than two hours, and gameplay seems to be about button-mashing rather than complex martial arts strategy.

—Chris Talbot



## Dragon's Lair 3D

The only thing worse than a disappointing video game is when it taints a well-respected franchise. Such is the case with *Dragon's Lair 3D: Return to the Lair*.

*Dragon's Lair* was the world's first laserdisc coin-operated game to successfully blend animation and arcade gameplay into one machine. The player assumed the role of Dirk the Daring out to rescue the kidnapped Princess Daphne from the clutches of an evil wizard, Mordroc, and a dragon named Singe.

*Return to the Lair* revisits the original storyline. This time, Dirk has freedom of movement. He also has a new arsenal of moves and two weapons - his trusty sword and a crossbow.

Unfortunately, trying to control Dirk is a game in itself. The game also suffers from shoddy camera angles, which is a serious problem when timing jumps.

Alas, *Dragon's Lair 3D* is not worth your time or money, and it's certainly a shame for fans of this once-groundbreaking series. Instead consider buying the DVD version of the original game.

Marc Saltzman

Publisher: Ubi Soft Developer: Dragonstone Software



★★★½

In some ways the Xbox port is actually more fun to play than the original. We'd still recommend the PC as the best

place to experience *Ghost Recon*, but Xbox owners shouldn't feel they're getting short-changed.

—Frank Lenk



## HOST RECON

Publisher: Ubi Soft Developer: Red Storm Entertainment

Sophisticated PC titles don't always work on console, but Ubi Soft has done an excellent job with *Ghost Recon*, translating this complex shooter with its essentials intact. The game includes 15 missions set in the politically-dodgy Baltic states. Each mission mixes search-and-destroy action with specialized maneuvers.

Action is intensely realistic. It takes only one or two clean hits to take a man out. There are no power-ups, no ammo packs lying under trees and no ghoulish revivals of dead teammates.

No gamepad is ever going to rival the PC's mouse-and-keyboard combo, but Ubi Soft has done a remarkably good job of cramming all the intricacies of squad command onto every available button, D-pad and thumbstick.

For multiplayer, you get split screen, system link and Live options. Up to 16 players can join in, playing against each other or combining forces against the AI.

In some ways the Xbox port is actually more fun to play than the original. We'd still recommend the PC as the best place to experience *Ghost Recon*, but Xbox owners shouldn't feel they're getting short-changed.



# DVD

## NEW RELEASES

- The Rules of Attraction
- Road to Perdition
- The Tuxedo
- Knockaround Guys
- City by the Sea
- One Hour Photo
- Stealing Harvard
- Spy Kids 2 -  
The Island of Lost Dreams
- Tuck Everlasting
- Formula 51

# DVD

## DESTINATION

# DVD

## COMING SOON

- The Ring
- I-Spy
- SwimFan
- 8 Mile
- White Oleander
- Abandon
- Maid in Manhattan
- Inspector Gadget 2
- Ghost Ship
- Bollywood/Hollywood



# HOT NEW DVD's COMING SOON!

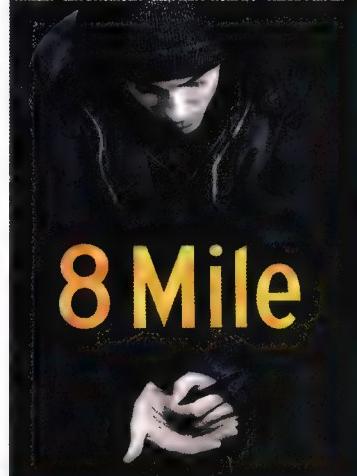
SPRING IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER AND THIS SEASON'S NEW RELEASES ARE SURE TO BRING ALL THE ACTION AND ADVENTURE TO LIFE WITH ALL NEW DVD RELEASES LIKE "8 MILE" STARRING EMINEM OR THE HILARIOUS COMEDY "I SPY" STARRING EDDIE MURPHY AND OWEN WILSON. OTHER HOT NEW TITLES SUCH AS CITY BY THE SEA STARRING ROBERT DE NIRO OR KNOCKAROUND GUYS STARRING VIN DIESEL ARE AVAILABLE FOR RENTAL IN ALL BLOCKBUSTER LOCATIONS. NOT INTO ACTION, CHECK OUT THE FAMILY FUN OF SPY KIDS 2: THE ISLAND OF LOST DREAMS. ARE YOU A FAN OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS...CHECK IT OUT IN ALL GAME PLATFORMS...XBOX, PS2 AND GAMECUBE. SO COME ON IN, CHECK US OUT AND MAKE IT A BLOCKBUSTER NIGHT!

## 8 MILE AVAILABLE March 18, 2003

**Cast:** Eminem, Kim Basinger, Brittany Murphy, Mekhi Phifer

8 Mile, a drama set against the 1995 Hip-Hop scene in Detroit, is about the boundaries that define our lives and a young man's struggle to find the strength and courage to transcend them. **DVD Features:** Never before seen scenes, Eminem performances from the movie set, Eminem rap battles, never before seen "Superman" video, and much more.

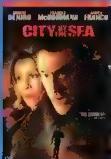
EMINEM KIM BASINGER BRITTANY MURPHY MEKHI PHIFER



Rated: 18A

# DVDS & GAMES

[www.blockbuster.ca](http://www.blockbuster.ca)



## CITY BY THE SEA AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 18, 2003

**Cast:** Robert DeNiro, James Franco, Frances McDormand, Eliza Dushku  
New York City detective Vincent LaMarca has forged a long and distinguished career in law enforcement, making a name for himself as a man intensely committed to his work. But on his latest case, the stakes are higher -- the suspect he's investigating is his own son. In the course of the investigation, he discovers that his own unresolved pain and failures as a father have deeply influenced Joey's life, and now his 18-month old grandson may be forced to follow their self-destructive paths. **DVD features:** Commentary with Director and cast, "Mark of the Murdered" featurette.

Rated: 14A  
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## KNOCKAROUND GUYS AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 18, 2003

**Cast:** Barry Pepper, Vin Diesel, Seth Green, Dennis Hopper, John Malkovich

The four sons of major Brooklyn mobsters have to team up to retrieve a bag of cash in a small Montana town ruled by a crooked sheriff. The story gets started when Matt Demarett goes on a job to bring the money for his mob father on the advice of his uncle. Things don't go as planned though...

**DVD Features:** Filmmaker commentary, Deleted scenes, Theatrical trailers.

Rated: 14A

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## THE RING AVAILABLE MARCH 4, 2003

**Cast:** Naomi Watts, Martin Henderson, Brian Cox

Seconds after a new widow watches a mysterious videotape, the phone rings, telling them they have only seven days to live. A young reporter named Rachel begins investigating these events after her niece becomes the latest victim. But once she and her young son watch the tape, her research turns into a frantic race against time to find out why the tape is killing everyone and how it can be stopped. **DVD features:** Widescreen, English and French tracks.

Rating: 14A

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## I-SPY AVAILABLE MARCH 11, 2003

**Cast:** Eddie Murphy, Owen Wilson, Famke Janssen

When the Switchblade, the most sophisticated prototype stealth fighter created yet, is stolen from the U.S. government, one of the United States' top spies, Alex Scott, is called to action. What he doesn't expect is to get teamed up with a cocky civilian, World Class Boxing Champion Kelly Robinson, on a dangerous top secret espionage mission. Their assignment: using equal parts skill and humour, catch Arnold Gundars, one of the world's most successful illegal arms dealers, and foil his treacherous plans for the plane. **DVD features:** Director's commentary, deleted scenes, Gag reel, four featurettes and much more.

Rating: PG

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## ABANDON AVAILABLE MARCH 18, 2003

**Cast:** Katie Holmes, Benjamin Bratt

A senior at an elite college, Catherine is under severe pressure, which is compounded when a police detective, begins investigating the two year-old disappearance of her boyfriend. As the investigation continues, she is forced to choose between her past passions and new possibilities, even as surprising new facts arise about her boyfriend and his possible connection to another disappearance from campus. **DVD features:** Commentary by director/writer Stephen Gaghan, The making of, deleted and extended scenes, theatrical trailers.

Rating: PG

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# GAME RENTALS

## PS2

- 1) THE GETAWAY
- 2) DEVIL MAY CRY 2
- 3) GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY
- 4) THE SIMS
- 5) TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON
- 6) THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
- 7) ATV OFFROAD FURY 2
- 8) MEDAL OF HONOR FRONTLINE
- 9) JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE
- 10) NHL 2003

## XBOX

- 1) TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL
- 2) DOA EXTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL
- 3) THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
- 4) TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON
- 5) MEDAL OF HONOR FRONTLINE
- 6) HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED
- 7) JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE
- 8) MECH ASSAULT
- 9) NHL 2003
- 10) PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

## GAMECUBE

- 1) THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
- 2) MARIO PARTY 4
- 3) SUPER SMASH BROS.
- 4) METROID PRIME
- 5) ANIMAL CROSSING
- 6) SONIC ADVENTURE 2
- 7) STAR FOX ADVENTURE
- 8) MEDAL OF HONOR FRONTLINE
- 9) JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE
- 10) SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

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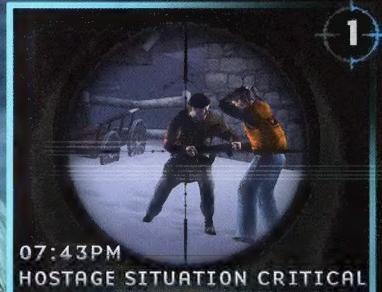
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